

Sexting Narrative for Judiciary Committee Legislative Hearing 3-22-2010

Good Morning. My name is Dr. Ruby Corby O'Neill and I'm here with students from Post University in Waterbury where I'm the Associate Professor of Psychology and a tenured Faculty member. The students are Forensic Psychology minors taking the Special Topics in Forensic Psychology course that I teach. Thank you Chairmen Lawlor and McDonald and the committee for allowing us to be here and the opportunity for the students to be participants in their own governance and to present their findings of a literature review which we hope informs the Committee's thinking about raised Bill No. 5533, An Act Concerning Sexting.

This new phenomenon of sexting that has hit the technological social networking landscape is generating a lot of concern. Educators and social scientists are concerned about the social, emotional, and cognitive consequences of this new form of cyberbullying and sexual objectification.

Some of the information we found involved surveys on sexting and cyberbullying. While the survey results could be challenged on the technical basis of the psychometric properties of validity & reliability, random sampling and representativeness, there is *no* doubt that we have stepped through the window into "teenland" and we're gaining greater insight into what happens there. The media has reported teen sexting incidents and consequences from all over this country – and we will hear today about an incident in another country. With technology and increasing globalization, the world is flat, and toxic technology will have widespread effects. This is a call to action and taking a necessary proactive approach to this rising phenomenon of sexting and its consequential damages can not wait for the construction of the perfect survey or the perfect sample.

*Sexting* is the new vehicle for sexual objectification. In my own dissertation work years ago on the objectification of adolescent girls, girls voiced varying levels of resistance and resignation to physical, verbal, and visual objectification. Today, technology – sexting – aids in this objectification. And when pictures are mass distributed, the person in the picture, typically female, is severed from her own body and she's no longer considered by others a co-interactant in social life, resulting in her being socially disenfranchised to act on her own behalf – and her sex, gender, and sexuality become a disembodied material reality to be traded publicly. This leads to serious consequences.

The research team will now present their findings that we hope can be used by schools, courts, and agencies as they rise to the challenge of addressing this damaging behavior with consideration of the sensitive, critical developmental moment in the lifespan – adolescence – and an eye toward therapeutic jurisprudence. Thank You.